The Vault's entrance ramp descended in a wide spiral, its walls a smooth pale composite embedded in the ice. Heat radiated gently from hidden conduits, erasing the bite of the wind as they moved downward. The light shifted from the blue of the polar sky to a warmer, golden tone, like sinking into the throat of a lamp.

At intervals along the wall, plaques had been mounted—thin metal sheets engraved with short texts in Lumina and several old languages. Each plaque bore a single year and a phrase.

2071 – The Plurality Accord signed. First freeze on armament expansion.

2073 – First orbital de-weaponization completed.

2079 – Final deployment of autonomous conflict systems prohibited.

Anastasia walked between them, listening as Alina narrated brief stories for each line. Behind them, the elders moved slowly, some leaning on canes, some on each other. Their footsteps made soft, hollow sounds on the ramp.

"They wanted a record that wasn't just numbers," Alina explained. "Not just megatons and casualty projections. Something you could touch on the way down."

"Stories are heavier than numbers," Anastasia said. "They fall slower."

At the base of the spiral, the ramp opened into a vast circular chamber—the Vault proper. The ceiling arched high overhead, supported by ribs of composite and ice. Rows of recessed bays lined the walls, each holding a long, sleek object wrapped in fields of faint blue light.

World-ender cores, the old language in her memory supplied. Spear-heads for storms.

Even now, dormant and suspended, they radiated a quiet menace. It wasn't the menace of active threat; it was the memory of what they had once been intended to do.

Zarya's presence brightened in her mind, a warm structure at the back of her thoughts.

"Harmonic coherence in the Vault is within expected parameters," Zarya said. "No anomalous energy fluctuations detected. Cognitive stress indicators among present personnel are elevated but not destabilizing."

"That's one way to say everyone is nervous," Anastasia murmured.

"Accuracy prioritized over euphemism," Zarya replied.

Anastasia almost smiled.

In the center of the chamber stood a raised platform. On it, a console had been unfolded from the floor—an oval of dark glass and filament, humming softly. Beside it, a smaller pedestal

held a simple metal disk, its surface blank.

Rafiq gestured toward the platform.

“This is where the formal protocol begins,” he said. “Once you authorize, the control stack will cascade through the Assemblies. We’ll have one more confirmation round, and then…”

“And then the Last Armory stops being an armory,” Anastasia said.

“That’s the plan,” he said.

The elders approached, forming a loose semicircle around the platform. Some of them she recognized from earlier years, faces she had seen in war rooms and negotiation halls. Others were new, but their eyes carried the same complicated mixture of pride and grief.

Anastasia stepped up onto the platform. The console’s surface brightened as she neared, lines of text blooming across it in Lumina glyphs and old script variants. A soft warmth pulsed under her palms as she placed her hands on the edge.

“Zarya,” she thought. “Let’s review.”

“Authorization protocol ready,” Zarya said. “Neural signature locks confirmed. Plurality Accord compliance verified. Do you wish to proceed with full dismantling, conditional repurposing, or staged archival?”

She breathed in slowly, feeling the years settle on her shoulders—not as weight, but as context.

“Full dismantling,” she said. “Conditional repurposing for non-weapon applications, as outlined in the Denali memorandum and subsequent Assembly resolutions.”

“Acknowledged,” Zarya said. “We will require a verbal statement for the record.”

“Of course you will,” Anastasia said softly.

She glanced over her shoulder. The others watched in hushed expectation. Alina’s hands were clasped tightly in front of her. Rafiq’s jaw was set. The elders stood like worn statues, trying not to lean too heavily on their canes.

Anastasia turned back to the console.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Zarya said.

Anastasia touched the metal disk on the small pedestal. Its surface warmed instantly, responding to her biometrics. A faint chime sounded, echoing gently through the Vault.

“State your name and role for the record,” Zarya said, her voice now audible in the chamber.

“Anastasia Mikhailovna Sokolova,” she said. “Citizen of St. Petersburg. Servant of the Living. On behalf of those who still find it strange to walk under a quiet sky, and those who have never heard the thunder of war, I witness and accept this dismantling.”

“Authorization received,” Zarya said. “Signature recorded.”

Lights shifted along the chamber walls. A soft vibration pulsed underfoot as deep systems woke fully for the first time in years.

“Circulatory Assembly hubs,” Zarya said, “you have received the authorization packet. Do you confirm?”

In a coastal city thousands of kilometers away, a group of randomly selected citizens sat in a circle around a table, hand terminals projecting the packet. In a floating Atlantic platform, another circle did the same. In a desert region transformed by solar forests, a third circle examined the terms.

They had rehearsed this, but rehearsal was not the same as the act itself.

After a few minutes that felt much longer, their responses came.

“Coastal Assembly confirms.”

“Atlantic Platform Assembly confirms.”

“Desert Basin Assembly confirms.”

“Denali council?” Zarya said.

In the mountains, under the ice, among the elders of Denali, a hand rested on a carved stone.

“We confirm,” a voice said, soft and clear. “And we remember.”

Zarya’s harmonic field shifted in Anastasia’s mind—a tightening and then an almost musical release.

“Final protocol engaged,” Zarya said. “Unique control stack severed. Cores respecified. Icehold is no longer an armory. It is now registered as Materials and Memory Repository D-01.”

The faint red outlines on the consoles dissolved into green.

The weapons did not explode. They did not vanish in a storm of light.

They began, instead, to be bored.

Microscopic tools, guided by precise fields, started to unweave their complexity, breaking down delicate lattices into simpler forms that could be shaped into benign devices. The Vault hummed, low and steady, like a huge beast finally exhaling.

Havel staggered back from the console.

“That’s it?” he said hoarsely. “After all those years, that’s… it?”

Alina touched his arm.

“You were expecting thunder?” she asked gently.

“Maybe,” he said. “A sign. A… something.”

Anastasia looked around the chamber—the rows of bays, the elders, the soft, persistent work of transformation.

“This is the sign,” she said. “Nothing happened. No one died. The only thing that changed is what these atoms will be used for next.”

“It feels…” Havel began, then trailed off.

“Anti-climactic?” she offered.

He huffed a quiet laugh.

“Yes.”

“Good,” she said. “We have had enough drama in this world. Let some miracles arrive quietly.”